

## EVALUATION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT OF THE PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

### **Abstract**

Utilization of the projects for achieving large processes, relatively unique, with high strategic importance, implies specific organizational competences, besides the individual competences. The process of pre-accession and post-accession of Romania to the European Union had, and still has, a major influence on the institutional framework and on the methodology in which programs and projects and, more extended, the implementation of public policies are implemented in Romania. Moreover, it is noticed the trend within the Romanian public administration thwarts a budgetary system based on programs.

Public institutions should perform an evaluation when significant changes occur, in order to facilitate the necessary improvements for their management capacity. The quality of their processes and the performance of their activities should be measured, in order to allow the identification of common measures that should be undertaken for improving the management of their projects and programs.

The paper presents an overview of the practices within public institutions from Romania that are implementing projects and programmes, with a view to clarify some aspects that are deriving from the incumbent of this practice. The analyses of current state in the Romanian public institutions that are implementing projects and programmes, reveals the need for using an evaluation tool for assessing the organizational capacity on managing projects.

**Keywords:** project, evaluation, organization capacity

**JEL CODES:** H11

# EVALUAREA CAPACITĂȚII ORGANIZAȚIONALE DE MANAGEMENT DE PROIECT A ORGANIZAȚIILOR PUBLICE

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### **Rezumat**

Utilizarea proiectelor pentru atingerea unor procese largi, relativ unice, cu o importanță strategică ridicată, implică competențe organizaționale specifice, în afara competențelor individuale. Procesul de pre-aderare și post-aderarea a României la Uniunea Europeană a avut și încă are o influență majoră asupra cadrului instituțional și asupra metodologiei în care proiectele și programele, și în sens extins, politicile publice sunt implementate în România. Mai multe decât atât, este remarcată tendința administrației publice din România către un sistem bugetar bazat pe programe.

Instituțiile publice ar trebui să fie evaluate de fiecare dată când sunt produse schimbări majore, pentru a facilita îmbunătățirile necesare a capacității de management. Calitatea proceselor din cadrul instituțiilor și a performanțelor activităților derulate ar trebui măsurate pentru a permite identificarea de acțiuni comune care trebuie întreprinse pentru îmbunătățirea managementului proiectelor și programelor.

Articolul prezintă o analiză a practicilor din cadrul instituțiilor publice din România, care implementează proiecte și programe, pentru a clarifica anumite aspecte care derivă din utilizarea acestei practici. Analiza situației existente în instituțiile publice din România care implementează proiecte și programe, evidențiază necesitatea utilizării unui instrument pentru evaluarea capacității organizaționale pentru managementul proiectelor.

**Cuvinte cheie:** proiect, evaluare, capacitate organizațională



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Often when we refer to performance within a project or program we consider the evaluation of the project or programme itself, at the most, the management of the project or programme, but less on the evaluation of the organizational/institutional capacity for managing projects. This would refer to the way in which an organization has the technical and management capacity to implement projects/programmes.

The process of pre-accession and post-accession of Romania to the European Union had, and still has, a major influence on the institutional framework and on the methodology in which programs and projects and, more extended, the implementation of public policies are implemented in Romania. The implementation of European Union funded pre-accession and post-accession programs have imposed a particular style in their management. Also, it is noticed the trend within the Romanian public administration thwarts a budgetary system based on programs. An organization should perform an evaluation when significant changes occur, in order to facilitate the necessary improvements for its management capacity.

The paper analyses the developments occurred in Romania regarding the management by projects approach, and proposing a model for evaluating organizational capacity on managing projects for public institutions. The first chapter presents a brief literature review on management by project approach. The second chapter presents Romania's experience in implementing European Union funded projects and programmes. The third chapter presents the proposed model for evaluating the institutional capacity for managing projects in public institutions from Romania. In the conclusions chapter are presented the advantages of using this model, as well as the next stages for implementing the use of this model.

## 2. MANAGEMENT BY PROJECTS APPROACH

Utilization of the projects for achieving large processes, relatively unique, with high strategic importance, implies specific organizational competences, besides individual competences, in an organization oriented thwarts projects (Gareis, 2010, p. 583).

By using the approach management by projects as organizational strategy, the organization oriented on projects aims the following objectives (Gareis 2010, p. 545):

- Development of the organization flexibility, by creating the temporary structures, besides the permanent structure;

- Delegation of the management responsibilities of projects and programs;
- Orientation thwarts objectives by defining the projects and programs objectives, and
- Facilitating the organizational learning through the use of its potential monitored in projects and programs.

A review of the literature regarding the absorption of the EU structural funds in Romania reveals a lack of adequate conceptual framework, while the topic of better ways to manage these funds is less addressed. As the explanation could not be related to the lack of interest in studying such a problem, the reasons are essentially linked to its relative novelty, to the difficulties in assessing ...the construction of appropriate ... measurement of the absorption capacity (Zaman, 2009, p.141). The countries with appropriate institutions settings and policies may absorb important funds in support of their economies. The countries with a lower capacity will reach much sooner the saturation point after which the funds for aid become unproductive (Cace, 2010, p. 99).

At the same time, in the countries from Central and Eastern Europe there is also another dominant trend: many of them are opting for a narrower concept of public function, in which civil servants are only those who have authority or are directly involved in achieving the policies and elaborating or implementing the legislation. The main political reason that hides behind this choice seems to be the processes of privatization and restructuring the public sector (Onofrei, 2010, p.111).

Moreover, in a study on citizens' perception about public administration reforms in Romania, the population agrees with the need for these reforms in the public sector but the shape of the past and present reform efforts is unclear and the results are not those expected (Sandor, 2008, p.121).

A SWOT analysis of Romanian Local Public Administration indicates that there is a limited flow of information regarding the management methods and techniques used in the public administration (Florescu, 2008, pp. 11-12).

Creating conditions for a higher capacity of absorption of structural funds means that in the process of putting policies into practice *all principles* – programming, partnership, co-financing, concentration, monitoring, evaluation and control - are applied in compliance with the EU rules and the European Commission's proposals with regard to efficiency, transparency are entirely understood and carefully observed (Profiroiu, 2009, p.153).

In our paper it is presented an overview of the practices within public organizations in Romania that are implementing projects and programmes, with a view to clarify some aspects that are deriving from the incumbent of this practice.

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF EU FUNDED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES IN ROMANIA

Starting with the negotiation process with the European Union, in February 2000, Romania has focused on adoption and preparation of implementing the communitarian acquis in all areas of policy. Since then and until the accession, Romania has undergone a process of major institutional changes, legal and structural. The European Union – Romanian cooperation begun in 1990; the financial assistance of European Union to Romania started in 1991, the main instrument being Phare (from 1991), completed by ISPA and SAPARD (after 1999). Approximately 7 billion EUR and more than 1,000 experts and EU officials sustained the Romanian integration efforts.

Since its accession to the EU, in 1st of January 2007, Romania become responsible of the implementation process of the EU funded programs, under the Extended Decentralization Implementation System (EDIS). As Romania gained important experience in implementation and coordination of EU funded programs, the system set up was rapidly developed, therefore between 2005-2006 started the Extended Decentralization Implementation System (EDIS) accreditation process. The first EDIS phase started in 2002, through an evaluation of the National Fund and of the Implementing Agencies, at the level of Phare and ISPA programs. In 2004 there was carried out an updated analysis of the needs. The second EDIS phase, aiming to gaps filling presented by the analysis, was initiated by the National Fund and by the Implemented Agencies, being completed in 2005. The third EDIS phase, which prepared the transition to EDIS, covered the conformity evaluation. The report established that all conditions were meet. The recommendations were put in practice, therefore all three phases were completed by the end of 2005. Therefore, the Romanian authorities submitted to the European Commission the official request for EDIS accreditation (which is considered forth EDIS phase). The accreditation was received in 28 June 2006 for ISPA, and 14 December 2006 for Phare, Romania being the first country receiving EDIS accreditation before its EU accession.

A proper management of the implementation of the EU programmes has been a constant preoccupation of the Romanian administration, stimulated by EU requirements and the conditionality attached to the use of EU funds. The Ministry of Public Finance adopted a Single Action Plan aiming at improving the management systems for the operation of the EU funds in Romania (pre-accession funds and structural instruments). The Single Action Plan's overall purpose is to improve the Romanian administration's capacity to manage in an effective and efficient way and to absorb the increased flow of funds coming from the European Union. Total allocation of structural and cohesion funds for Romania is 19.2 billion EUR. Complemented by national public contribution, the entire amount available amounts 23.3 billion EUR. On an annual basis this represents 2.3% of the annual GDP, according to the Eurostat data.

The European Union financing support is implemented through the structural instruments (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and Cohesion Fund) and two complementary actions (European Fund for Agriculture and Rural Development and the European Fisheries Fund). The programming and the implementation of structural funds are done through the Operational Programs (OP). The National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 (Government of Romania, 2007) is created by the Member States as part of their National Development Plan and is adopted by the European Commission.

The Authority for the Coordination of Structural Instruments (ACIS) is the institution entrusted with the coordination of management and delivery of the Structural Instruments in Romania, assuming the responsibilities assigned to the "CSF Managing Authority" in Government Decision No 128/2006 modifying GD No 497/2004. ACIS was placed within the Ministry of Economy and Finance (latter Ministry of Public Finance); at the beginning on 2011, ACIS was placed within the General Secretariat of the Government, under the Prime Minister authority. Its tasks are to coordinate the programming, implementation and evaluation of Operational Programmes under the NSRF, including ensuring coordination and coherence between the programmes.

The National Strategic Reference Framework describes the institutional set up for the management of the Structural Instruments: the Managing Authorities, the Intermediary Bodies, the Monitoring Committees, the evaluation and control arrangements. Nevertheless, there is no provision regarding to the arrangements related to the institutional setting within the public institutions that are implementing, as beneficiary, projects funded through Structural Instruments. The implementation of the Operational Programs proved to be a challenge for the Romanian public administration. This fact does not relate only to the Managing Authorities that are coordinating the Operational Programs, but it relates directly to the capacity of the beneficiaries to implement the projects. At 31 of May 2011 there were 5,886 projects contracted, from which we assume that about one third are implemented directly or at least coordinated by the public administration authorities, both central and local. The absorption rate, even it improved in past year, it is still considered as being low, with 12,4% disbursement, from the EU allocated budget for Romanian in the programming period 2007-2013. The large number of projects are under implementation. Also, since about 62% allocated budget was contracted, another 2,000 projects might be contracted in the next 1-2 years. This put a high pressure on the beneficiary, especially on the public institutions, that are implementing the projects contracted.

**TABLE 1 - OVERVIEW ON PROJECTS FUNDED THROUGH OPERATIONAL PROGRAMS (31 MAY 2011)**

OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME	EU ALLOCATED BUDGET 2007- 2013 (BILLION EUR)	NO OF PROJECTS CONTRACTED	CONTRACTED RATIO (%)	PAYMENT RATIO (%)
REGIONAL OP	3.72	1,485	69.51	21.50
ENVIRONMENT OP	4.51	196	73.04	9.86
TRANSPORT OP	4.56	44	20.09	2.61
INCREASE OF ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS OP	2.55	1,766	51.31	12.58
HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT OP	3.47	2,034	103.97	19.10
ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OP	0.21	302	58.25	7.44
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OP	0.17	59	33.60	8.98
TOTALS	19.21	5,886	61.97	12.40

Source: Authority for Coordination of the Structural Instruments, Romanian Government

#### 4. PROPOSED MODEL FOR EVALUATING THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR MANAGING PROJECTS IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS FROM ROMANIA

Our research on evaluating the institutional capacity for managing projects in public institutions from Romania did not identified models or case studies on this approach. In general, the evaluation focuses on projects and less on the institutional capacity to manage projects. From the international practice, the Canadian model (*Organizational Project Management Capacity Assessment Tool*, Government of Canada, 2009) offers the possibility to develop a framework for analysing, evaluating and promoting institutional structures for the organization that use management by project approach, which will assure the premises for an improved performance in the implementation of the projects.

Remodelling an institutional structure within an organization based first on management processes and then on hierarchical department, requires development of analysis and evaluation instruments that should capture at least the following aspects:

1. Identification of the existing practices at the level of the public organizations from Romania, to implement projects/programs (type and the project level);
2. Identification of the applied processes and management activities;
3. Analysing the organization' structure and of its impact on the project management;
4. Identification of the capacity – organizational and functional - to manage projects;
5. Identification of the need to reshape the management structure, at least from the functional point of view, in implementing projects that will provide performance and quality of offered services, and a better management of the public resources (human, material, financial, aso);



The development of the evaluation instrument requires development of some important tools: 1) a survey that will be addressed to the public institutions that are managing projects; 2) evaluation methodology; 3) guide for completing and interpreting the survey.

For the clarification of concepts in this domain, following definitions are beneficial:

1. public management: includes the public administration and, in addition, aims to create a management system within the public institution to achieve the objectives with maximum of efficiency, by assuming the responsibilities for the obtained results. The fundamental objective of the public management is the increase of the satisfaction degree of the public interest, being determined by the general and specific needs. The new trends and changes that are used in the public management are considering following:
  - Professionalization of the public management;
  - Extensive use of informatics in public organization;
  - Flexibility of the public management;
  - Total Quality Management in public organizations;
  - Knowledge Based Management in public organizations;
  - Public management based on performance;
  - Modernizing the managerial tools used in the public organizations.
2. projects: Project Management Institute defines projects as a temporary effort to obtain a product, a service or an unique result (Project Management Institute, 2004). The projects are unique activities that should produce a clear set of outputs for the client, within the limits that are given by duration, budget and resources.
3. programmes: Project Management Institute defines programmes as group of projects that are connected and are coordinated in a way to produce benefits and to allow a control that is not possible in the case of individual management of this projects. Programmes could include results components from the activities that are exterior to the objective of the projects from the program (Project Management Institute, 2004).
4. projects portfolio: Project Management Institute defines the portfolio as a collection of projects or programs and other activities that are grouped for facilitating an efficient management in the sense of attaining the strategic objectives. The projects and programs involved are not necessary inter-dependent or directed correlated (Project Management Institute, 2004).

In the current context, in attaining the new functions of the public administration, the public organizations that manage or implement projects and programs (which have this as objective of their mission, but also a form of organization) requires a new vision and a new form of organization, at least from the functional point of view.

The quality of their processes and the performance of their activities should be measured, at the current stage, objectives have to be set, and implementation should be standardized, at the level of all public organizations from Romania. Such analysis would allow the identification of common measures that should be undertaken in order to improve the management of the projects and programs within the public institutions.

An organization should be evaluated when a significant change occurs, so that its management capacity to be re-projected to cope with this change. An organizational policy for managing projects is essential for establishing the roles and the responsibilities of each of member of the project team, based on her/his abilities, as well as on the position that s/he has in the organization. As example, we could identify that the project manager is a state secretary, which has a high hierarchical position in the organization, but which is political appointed, which could be replaced any time, not depending on the project' performances. In such circumstances, the organizational capacity for managing projects could suffer an important gap. Therefore, the two standards that defines the organizational capacity to manage projects and capacity to manage the projects is correlated in the management policy of the project of each organization, or, more concretely, in the policy that is promoted at the high level, by the government.

To establish a global understanding of the organizational capacity to manage projects it should be considered the method to aggregate the relevant data within the organization. For example, data could be collected and analyzed at the level of an established project management office. Such structured approach should facilitate the collection of data and to allow to the organization to identify easier the project management topics and the opportunities to invest in its capacity at individual or global level.

The proposed model for evaluation of the organizational capacity on project management of the public organizations is structured on 13 criteria grouped on 3 areas, as presented in the following table.



TABLE 2 - AREAS AND CRITERIA EVALUATION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Organizational Adaptability	Investment Portfolio Management				
	Investment Program Management				
	Organizational Support Structures				
	Project Management Standards				
Project Management (core structure)	Project Integration Management	Project Scope Management	Project Time Management	Project Cost Management	Project Risk Management
Supporting Project Management	Project Quality Management				
	Project Procurement Management				
	Project Human Resource Management				
	Project Communications Management				

The definition of each criteria that is proposed to be used for the evaluation of the organizational capacity on project management of the public organizations is presented in the following table.

TABLE 3 - DEFINITION OF CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Criteria	Definition
Organizational Integration	
1. Investment Portfolio Management	This refers to the selection and support of projects or investment program investments. These investments in projects and investment programs are guided by the organization's strategic plan and available resources.
2. Investment Program Management	This refers to the centralized, coordinated management of an investment program, designed to achieve the program's strategic objectives and benefits.
3. Organizational Support Structures	These are the organizational structures and mechanisms that support project, investment program, and investment portfolio management.
4. Project Management Standards	This refers to evidence of compliance with a standard methodology reflecting best practices for project management, investment program management, and investment portfolio management.
Core Project Management	
5. Project Integration Management	This includes the processes and activities needed to identify, define, combine, unify, and coordinate the various processes and project management activities within the project management process groups. Within the project management context, integration includes characteristics of unification, consolidation, articulation, and integrative actions that are crucial to project completion and successfully meeting customer and stakeholder requirements and expected outcomes.
6. Project Scope Management	This primarily consists of defining and controlling what is and is not included in the scope of the project. It includes processes needed to ensure that the project includes all the work required, and only the work required, to complete the project successfully, based on the original or formally updated requirements.
7. Project Time Management	This includes the processes required to accomplish timely completion of the project.
8. Project Cost Management	This includes the processes involved in planning, estimating, budgeting, and controlling costs so that the project can be completed within the approved budget.
9. Project Risk Management	This includes the processes concerned with conducting risk management planning, identification, analysis, responses, and monitoring and control on a project to prevent risks occurrence and limit their impact.

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Criteria	Definition
Supporting Project Management	
10. Project Quality Management	This includes the processes and activities of the performing organization that determine quality related policies, objectives, and responsibilities to ensure the project will satisfy the business needs for which it was undertaken. A quality management system implements policy and procedures, through continuous process improvement activities and processes of a project.
11. Project Procurement Management	This includes the processes required to purchase or acquire the products, services, or results needed from outside the project team to deliver project outputs and outcomes. Project procurement management also includes the contract management and change control processes required to administer contracts or purchase orders issued by authorized project team members. It also includes administering any contract and administering contractual obligations placed on the project team by the contract.
12. Project Human Resource Management	This includes the organization and management of the project team. The project team is comprised of the people who have assigned roles and responsibilities for completing the project and within the organization.
13. Project Communications Management	This includes the processes required to ensure timely and appropriate generation, collection, distribution, storage, retrieval, and ultimate disposal of project information.

The importance and the relevance of a criteria or a domain that is evaluated with a 5 points scale (from 0 – minimum to 5 – maximum). The knowledge areas have a different number of questions, ranging from 2 questions (for Project Communications Area) to 21 questions (for Project Integration Management Area); the maximum total score is 460, as presented in the following table.

TABLE 4 - SCORING OF THE KNOWLEDGE AREAS

Knowledge Area	No. of Questions	Maximum score
Investment Portfolio Management and Investment Program Management	10	50
Organizational Support Structures	9	45
Project Management Standards	20	100
Project Integration Management	21	105
Project Scope Management	4	20
Project Time Management	5	25
Project Cost Management	7	35
Project Risk Management	4	20
Project Quality Management	2	10
Project Procurement Management	4	10
Project Human Resource	4	20
Project Communications	2	10
TOTALS	92	460

The proposed evaluation tool uses a score scale with maximum of 460 points. Expressed as percentage, this score fits within a range corresponding to a capacity class, presented as follow:

TABLE 5 - CAPACITY CLASS DEFINED BY THE SCORE OBTAINED

Capacity Class	Definition	Rating
<b>0 – Limited organizational capacity – incipient phase</b>	At this class, organizations tend not to have consistent project management discipline, but rely on the skills of individual project managers for success. In this category, the organizations that implement projects do not promote a consistent discipline on project management at the level of project nor at organization level, it is based on individual abilities of the managers and/or the project team members to succeed.	< 25 / 100 %
<b>1- Sustained organizational capacity – emerging phase</b>	The organization has the capacity to successfully deliver projects to maintain its operational capacity. At this class, organizations tend to apply basic project management capabilities to projects, project planning tends to be more efficient and reporting often begins to be centralized. Here are present the disfunctionalities within the project management structures, but also at the organizational level.	25 – 49 / 100 %
<b>2 – Tactical organizational capacity – standardized phase</b>	The organization has the capacity to successfully deliver projects to adjust its operations to meet planned objectives. At this class, project management processes tend to become standardized; project information is often collected centrally and projects tend to be approved and overseen by a designated governance body.	50 – 69 / 100 %
<b>3 – Evolutionary organizational capacity – maturing phase</b>	The organization has the capacity to successfully deliver projects to achieve evolving strategic objectives. At this class, organizations will have integrated multi-project planning and control, where projects are managed as investment programs where appropriate, to improve project selection, resource allocation and project timing. Project related processes are to be integrated with corporate processes and structures; project performance analysis is advanced enough to provide input to process improvement and project planning; and standard governance structures are in place for project approval and oversight.	70 – 90 / 100 %
<b>4 – Transformational organizational capacity – innovation phase</b>	The organization has the capacity to successfully deliver projects to change the way the organization does business. At this class, projects are selected and overseen based on contribution to the strategic plan. Project approval, timing and resource allocation decisions are continually re-assessed to ensure optimal use of resources. Project management practices are continuously improved based on measurement of key performance indicators of compliance and project success. Project and portfolio management information systems are used to share information between project teams and between projects and management. The organization is "projectized" structurally and culturally to optimize success of strategic projects.	>90 – 100 / 100 %

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of management by projects practice in public institutions from Romania demonstrates the need for the clarification and improvement of the project management structures, at the decisional level but also at the execution level, within ministries, governmental agencies and other structures from central and local administration.

The use of an evaluation tool, similar to the one presented in this article, will allow the development of a new set of internal standards and working plans that will aim to the improvement of the project management. It is important that decisional factors will embrace utilization of such instrument in order to use it as political and managerial tool.. The next steps in developing of the proposed evaluation instrument are:

1. Adapting the evaluation questionnaire;
2. Developing the evaluation guide and the methodology that will be used for applying the questionnaire. The guide will comprise a general framework, as well as the necessary guidance to adapt it to the specific of each public organization that is applying it.
3. Application and testing the instrument in order to allow generating of preliminary results that might provide the significant trends within the public organizations that are implementing projects and programmes. It would be ideal on developing a web based application (using open source software) that will allow the operating the data and generating the aggregated reports.

The evaluation of the activities and performance processes within the Romanian public organizations that are implementing projects should be standardized in order to have a unitary approach. Only such analysis would provide the objectivity of the restructuring measures and would allow the identification of common measures that should be undertaken in order to improve the management of the projects and programs within the public institutions.

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